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ABSTRACT

The question of what secondary school can do to cope with the large number of poor readers, the high relationship between dropouts and reading abilities, the widely varying abilities within the classrooms, and the increasing lack of interest in reading among young people is discussed. A secondary language arts program for nonacademic students that has proved a success is described. The program, tried in the Florence Public Schools, Florence, South Carolina, emphasized the student's worth as an individual, helped to increase his self-confidence, provided ways for him to experience success, and coordinated training in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The organization, results, and evaluation of the program are presented. It is concluded that the program reduced the number of dropouts and greatly increased student enthusiasm for reading and learning. (NH)

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Teenage Success: A Language Arts Program for the Nonacademic Student

Topic of Meeting: Innovative Classroom Practices in Teaching Reading

Section Topic: Teenage Success in reading

It has been said: "If you give a man a fish, you give him food for one day. If you teach a man to fish, you give him food for a lifetime."

Today many teenagers are dropping out of schools or even graduating from high schools without learning how to fish---without learning the communication skills necessary to make them productive citizens in our society.

Research reveals the large number of poor readers in the secondary schools, the high relationship between dropouts and reading abilities, the widely varying abilities within the classrooms, and the increasing lack of interest in reading among young people. The big question is: What can the secondary schools do to cope with these problems?

In attempting to answer this question, I would like to tell you a story of academic success enjoyed by nonacademic teenagers in a secondary language arts program. In this story, nonacademic students are those who find academic achievement difficult and who are not primarily interested in furthering their education beyond high school.

RE002 953

Louise T. Scott

Locale of the study

The schools of the study are a part of the Florence Public Schools, Florence, South Carolina. There are three senior high schools, five junior high schools and sixteen elementary schools. The district includes the city of Florence, population 62,000, and the outlying agricultural and industrial sections. The total school enrollment for the 1968-69 session was 15,045 pupils. The populations of the schools are from various socio-economic levels ranging from low to high middle class families.

Recognition of the need

As early as 1954 the school administration, having recognized the need for the teaching of reading beyond the elementary level, put into effect various procedures which did not produce the hoped-for success. A remedial reading program initiated in the junior high schools included 30 classes with seven teachers. Of the 1440 non-academic students in grades 7, 8, and 9, 600 or 41.7 per cent received remedial reading instruction. The aim of the remedial reading program was to help students who were retarded two years in reading. In the 8th grade, the instructional material was on 6th grade level. The basic English curriculum was modified by replacing the literature book with another on one reading level below the actual grade level but the grammar book was the same as that used by the academic students.

The results of 1967 random testing of nonacademic students in grades seven through ten revealed a wide range of reading abilities

within the classroom and emphasized the inadequacy of the existing English and reading programs. The green lines show the levels of the books being used in remedial reading; the red lines show the reading levels of the literature books.

Transparency - 1

Organizational procedures

Preliminary planning. In January of 1968, I consulted with the state supervisors of English and reading, secondary principals, guidance counselors, reading teachers, and English teachers, and we began formulating plans for a coordinated program of English and reading. Discussions at the first planning meeting centered around the need for developing a language arts curriculum based on levels of development rather than traditional grades. Appropriate instructional materials were previewed and evaluated. The extent of participation in each school was left to the discretion of the principal. Requests were received from five junior high schools for the establishment of thirty-eight classes with twenty-one teachers.

One senior high school, which had expressed a serious concern over the inability of students to perform in the prescribed English curriculum, was selected for a special study.

Organization of classes. Based on results of reading survey tests administered in April, 1968, the language arts program was organized on four phases of reading difficulty.

Transparency - 2

Phases of Language Arts Program

Junior High Schools

	Reading Grade Level	Number of Classes
Phase I:	R-3	12
Phase II:	4-5	16
Phase III:	5-6	7
Phase IV:	6-7	3
	Total	38

Senior High School

	Reading Grade Level	Experimental	Control
Phase I;	R-3	1	1
Phase II:	4-5	1	1
Phase III:	5-6	1	1
Phase IV:	6-7	1	1

Students comprising the four phases of the senior high level were divided by random sampling into experimental and control groups. Because of the wide diversity in reading abilities, students from grades ten, eleven, and twelve were grouped together in classes scheduled for two-period time blocks each day. Senior-high students received one unit for English and one for remedial reading.

Teacher selection and preparation. Teachers were chosen because of their interest in and desire to participate in the program. Formal educational qualifications for them included certification in English; or, for those teaching in grades seven and eight, certification in elementary education or English. Courses in reading were desirable.

At a five-day workshop in August, Dr. Harold Herber, Syracuse University, and the state supervisors of English and reading discussed problems faced by classroom teachers in adjusting methods and materials

to the needs of students. Teachers outlined the objectives, stressing the importance of teaching the students on their levels of achievement rather than teaching books and of helping each student realize that he can succeed.

Methods and materials of instruction

Psychological needs of teenagers such as realizing their worth as individuals, increasing self-confidence, experiencing success, and being accepted by peers are considered as well as academic needs. Classroom climate is such that most students experience success and feel a sense of involvement in the total academic program rather than being designated as basic English students and remedial readers. Having a sense of belonging greatly improved attitudes. Since an informal atmosphere prevails in classrooms, students feel free to express their thoughts in oral discussions and in writing. Criticism of oral expression and "red-marking" compositions are minimized.

Teaching the communication skills as components of the total language arts program instead of in isolation more firmly establishes the concept of language relationships. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills are closely coordinated to emphasize their interrelatedness to the total program.

Developing listening skills. Nonacademic students often have short attention spans, cannot follow directions, need increased skill in auditory discrimination, and have not developed various levels of listening ability. To develop listening skills, opportunities are

given students to hear, listen, and understand through class discussions, teachers' explanations, background music while writing, conversations, dramatizations, oral reports, recordings, phonic tapes, and oral reading by students and teachers. Other approaches place emphasis on taking notes, playing listening games, completing listening exercises in labs, and participating in all class activities.

Through listening activities, students with substandard dialects have opportunities to hear a standard dialect and develop sentence patterns acceptable to the community.

Developing oral language skills. In order for students to feel secure in expressing their thoughts orally, teachers accept their dialects and oral language patterns. Some students need to expand their own language and to see the importance of changing their speech patterns. The ability to use speech patterns appropriate to the locale, expecially those that bring about social acceptance, is a principal objective of the program.

In acquiring oral communication skills, teachers emphasize aural-oral approach with talking, talking, talking in personal conversations with peers and adults, telephone communications, class and group discussions, role playing, interviews, taped dialogues, retelling stories, choral reading, debating, dramatizing, and reading radio and television commercials. Students, grouped by pairing, practice language development by using oral sentence patterns developed by teachers, oral language practice books, and oral reading to their partners.

The ability to communicate effectively is stimulated through the use of the tape recorder, video tape recorder, Language Master, tele-

phone equipment lent for class use, recorded speeches, oral language practice books, and a communication series.

Developing skills for reading. Reading deficiencies of some of the selected students make them potential dropouts. Insufficient reading skills, in the opinion of the content area teachers, seem to be the basis of their problems. After students are placed in phases according to reading grade scores, teachers use informal inventories, check lists, and observations to determine individual needs. Instruction for students in small groups, in partnership study, in students-tutored groups, and in individualized study are forms of intraclass grouping used to meet these needs.

For some students, reading goals are those necessary for survival in society such as reading newspapers; using telephone books; filling out forms; interpreting credit, savings, and interest rates; and understanding road maps and signs. Others need to become more proficient in word attack skills, to enlarge their vocabularies, to increase comprehension, to use study skills more effectively, to foster love for reading as a voluntary leisure-time activity, and to develop more mature and refined reading tastes.

The reading program is divided into three areas, with each designed for a definite purpose. For developmental reading and literature, books and sets of paperbacks are selected by teachers, keeping in mind the interests of teenagers. Students share experiences, discuss common stories, and achieve unity.

The second area is more individualized with each student being placed in material suited to his need and concentrating on building

and reinforcing skills. Multiple skilltext on various levels of difficulty, skilltapes, word games, and multi-level labs are used to overcome problems in word analysis, vocabulary, comprehension and study skills. Learning is made more interesting by the use of maps; periodicals; newspapers; forms, e.g., application, social security, insurance; brochures for military service; catalogues; telephone books; drivers' handbooks; savings account books; magazines, and records.

One senior high teacher asked the manager of the local paper if he would send her day old papers once a week. He became so interested he sends a set of the daily papers each morning. She uses these for her reading texts.

One of the most important areas is that of interesting teenagers in reading for pleasure. Approximately 5000 books, mostly paperbacks carefully selected on all reading and interest levels, are made available through classroom libraries. Many books are chosen from lists for bibliotherapy. Knowing that other people, although fictional, are faced with like problems helps teenagers solve their problems or to view them in a more favorable light.

Developing composition skills. As a departure from traditional methodology, the basic English text is replaced with a paperback text which coordinates the development of the four communication skills. Through practical application, the language principles taught inductively are used in composition exercises. Composition is made functional by intergrating it with the reading selections. Rather than practicing by writing isolated sentences, students are asked to react to ideas basic to stories they read.

Louise T. Scott

The philosophy of learning to write through the practice of writing as advocated by Fader in Hooked on Books is emphasized. Relaxed, unpressured writing activities as in journals give students opportunities to express their thoughts without fear of criticism. Pictures, paintings, recordings, films, filmstrips, transparencies, and personal experiences are used as stimuli for free-response writing. Expository efforts as writing a page on "How to Shine Your Shoes" or "How to Apply Makeup" are utilized as are several types of published materials. Pretending "If I Were", for instance a piece of chewing gum or a doormat, motivates some students to express their thoughts.

Teachers evaluate content as well as mechanics, concentrating on only one kind of error at a time. After reading compositions, teachers often discuss common errors and have students find their own errors. At the beginning of the year, some students are able to write only a few words or sentences. Later they write longer compositions with more clarity of expression.

Operational guide. As the program progressed, there was a need for the development of an operational guide to define more clearly the objectives and to coordinate the program of studies in the different phases. Transparency - 3 Guidelines set up include: (1) needs of the teenager; (2) goals to be accomplished; (3) skills to be developed: (4) methods of instruction; (5) materials to be used; and (6) kinds of evaluation. The guide helps teachers realize the importance of teenage needs, provides practical suggestions for effective instruction, and makes possible the exchange of ideas.

Methods of reporting. At the end of the first six-weeks' reporting period, a letter explaining the program is sent to parents. Transparency - 4 Teachers comment on student progress. No students fail. Transparency - 5 A new language arts report card, omitting numerical grades and adding space for teacher comments, is used.

Students progress is basic materials at various rates and different supplementary materials are used for different students. These factors necessitate students' progress cards, showing results of reading tests and English evaluations and progress in materials. Data are filed in cumulative records. Transparency - 6 & 7

Analysis of Data

The 1968-69 Program was evaluated according to the following plan:

Pre-testing and post-testing on the vocabulary and comprehension parts of the Gates-MacGinitie Reading Tests were used to measure the effectiveness of the language arts program in the junior high schools.

Transparency - 8

All schools made significant gains in comprehension as determined by *t* tests. All but two schools also made gains in vocabulary.

Transparency - 9

A nonstandardized English evaluation was used in pretesting and posttesting to measure growth in grammatical usage, sentence identification, sentence arrangement, and sequential order in paragraphs. *t* tests applied to data show significant gains made in sentence arrangement in all schools. Four schools gained significantly in sequential paragraph order; three in sentence identification; and one in grammatical usage.

Louise T. Scott

Transparency - 10

The most noticeable improvement was shown in writing. A non-standardized instrument was used in pretesting and posttesting and the data statistically treated. These pictures were used as stimuli for free writing samples.

Pictures

The compositions were evaluated on a 1-9 point rating scale on seven components.

Transparency - 11

All schools showed significant improvement in one or more of the following components: sentence sense, complexity of structure, surface conventions, vocabulary, frequency of stylistic devices, clarity of expression and content.

Transparency - 12 & 13

The writing samples were impartially evaluated by members of the local chapter of AAUW and the state supervisor of English.

To compare the new language arts curriculum and traditional English teaching on the senior high level, experimental and control groups were established. Data were collected from pretesting and posttesting, using the same instruments as used in the junior high schools, and treated by means of a simple analysis of covariance. Neither group showed significant gain in vocabulary at any phase. In comprehension, the experimental groups showed gains at all phases, but the gain was significant only in Phases III and IV.

In writing, the greatest improvement was shown in Phase I among the students who were in the readiness to grade three levels in September and whose need to improve was the greatest.

Louise T. Scott

Continuation of the program

Experiences in our initial program indicated the need for certain modifications.

This year we have a language arts chairman in each school. She has one period of released time each day to help teachers with planning, selecting materials, and choosing suitable methods.

Experience during the first year of the project revealed the dearth of published materials for teenagers reading on a primary level. This year in Phase I more emphasis is being placed on life-related activities such as reading newspaper advertisements and comparing prices, obtaining a social security card, studying driver regulations, filling out forms such as job application and draftboard personal data forms.

In two senior high schools where we had no language arts program last year we have set up the program in the tenth grade, adding Phase V for students on 7th and 8th grade reading levels. Next year the program will be extended to grades 11 and 12.

Last year there were 38 junior high classes, and four experimental classes on the senior high level and 24 teachers participating in the program.

This year we have 56 junior high classes, 16 senior high classes and 35 teachers working in the program.

Last year there were approximately 1,100 students in the program. This year there are approximately 2,000 students in the program.

Louise T. Scott

Concomitant results

In addition to the expansion of the program and the supporting statistical data, concomitant results further emphasized its effectiveness.

Some teachers were doubtful about the longer time block because of difficulty in interesting nonacademic students in formal grammar exercises and in literature with concepts they could not understand. Within only a few months, teachers began to feel the two-period block was two short; there was not enough time for all activities included in the new curriculum. Students were not bored and discipline problems were at a minimum.

After years of failure and frustration, many students experienced academic success. When one eighth-grade boy received his report card, he jumped out of his desk and exclaimed, "I've been coming to school eight years and this is the first time I ever made a B!" Grading students on their own achievement made these grades possible.

One senior-high student, temporarily suspended because of an accumulation of demerits, appeared at the door of the language arts class with a forged admission slip. When the teacher did not admit him, he pleaded, "Please let me come in and finish my book about Helen Keller. I like that lady."

Many students openly expressed their dislike for reading. After several weeks, classroom libraries afforded the most popular activity of the program. Students hid books so no one could get "my book."

Concensus of the principals was that the program reduced the number of dropouts. Only one-fourth of the dropouts in the involved

schools were in the program; three-fourths were in other English programs.

One principal summarized the feelings of the personnel involved when he said, "We usually have about forty dropouts by Thanksgiving. We have not had a single one this year. Now I know they were "runouts." We run them away from school with the type classes we put them in."

Dedicated teachers with deep understanding of human needs have made the classrooms dramatic scenes of human development. This can best be illustrated by the remarks of a curriculum supervisor who had visited in the classes. She called me and said, "I would like for our secondary principals to visit your language arts program. I know they won't understand all the types of skills being taught but I want them to feel the classroom climate and the rapport between teacher and students.

Whereas the program does not provide solutions to all problems, the statistical data is too strongly in support of its worth to be discounted; the enthusiasm of the faculty is proof that something of value has been accomplished; and the renewed faith of the teenage student that he can learn, what's more that learning is fun and opens up a whole new world to him, is convincing evidence that this new language arts approach is far superior to the traditional program that has for so long straightjacketed the teaching profession.